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State of the State Address

Delivered by Governor Bob Holden

Wednesday, January 30, 2001

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Mr. President Pro Tem, Distinguished State Officials, Mr. Chief Justice, Members of the State Supreme Court, Members of the 91st General Assembly, and Citizens of the State of Missouri:

One of our greatest blessings is sharing the important moments in our life with those we love most.

I am truly blessed today.

Before I begin, I want to introduce my parents, Lee and Wanda Holden.

Mom and Dad, thanks for coming, and would you please stand.

Next I want you to meet two young men who are keeping things pretty lively in the Governor's Mansion these days our sons, Robert and John D.

Boys, will you please stand.

Finally, saving the best for last, the First Lady in my life the only lady from the moment I first saw her and now the First Lady of the State of Missouri Lori Hauser Holden.

Growing up near the small, rural town of Birch Tree, Missouri, taught me a great deal.

First of all, I learned how to make a dollar go a long way because we didn't have a lot of them.

But there were so many other riches that can't be measured in monetary terms.

A rich community spirit that demonstrated how much could be accomplished by working together toward a common goal.

A rich acceptance of people based on their self worth not on how much they owned or how they looked.

A rich belief that solid values like honesty, loyalty, and responsibility, combined with lots of hard work, could lead to success.

And a deep understanding of the positive effect that love, support, and encouragement can have on a single life.

Along with my home, one of the first places I found that love, support, and encouragement was a little one-room schoolhouse, which housed all eight grades.

I don't remember a lot of details about my first day of school except my mother shedding a few tears as I started that mile and a half walk from our farm to the school.

But that mile and a half walk began a journey that would bring me to the door of the Governor's office.

Of course, at the time, I didn't realize how important that first walk was.

I was only six.

But on the other side of that school door as the only boy in a class of three I discovered a whole world of opportunities existed outside of Birch Tree.

The first teacher who inspired me to explore that world was a woman by the name of Bertha Smotherman.

I wanted Mrs. Smotherman to be with me today, but she recently suffered the loss of her husband.

I wanted her to be here so I could tell her that I've never forgotten what she wrote on my first grade report card.

I saved that grade card all these years, and today I'd like to read you what it says.

Mrs. Smotherman wrote: "I'll never forget how good Bobby has been all school year."

That compliment meant a lot to me, and I want her to know even if she is at home that I'll never forget how good she was to me all school year how she touched my life.

Mrs. Smotherman, I'm still trying to be good a good person, a good husband, a good father, and now a good Governor.

And you had a lot to do with those goals being important.

I want to thank you and all the rest of my teachers for the knowledge you shared and for making me believe that I had the power to take that knowledge and make a difference.

I'll never forget you.

Nor will I forget this day.

For this is a defining moment in our state's history.

Much like my first day of school, we are beginning this session with a clean slate.

A new Governor a new legislature a new century of opportunities.

And I believe we as public servants can explore those opportunities to benefit all Missourians if we follow the basic lessons I learned in Birch Tree so many years ago.

As those responsible for the state budget, we must provide Missourians with the assurance that their tax dollars go a long way.

We must set the example of working together never allowing partisanship to stand in the way of the best interests of those we serve.

Our actions must champion the acceptance of people based on their self worth regardless of status, appearance, or belief.

And our achievements must be guided by the recognition that some of our citizens have never experienced the advantages you and I received.

They have not experienced success, even though they hold solid values and work hard.

They have not known the love, support, and encouragement of family and community.

Yet a successful Missouri for all will only spring from opportunity for all.

BUDGET

Sometimes, opportunities come in the form of challenges.

This year presents one of those challenges in keeping Missouri's financial house in order.

Fortunately, we begin that task from a position of strength.

The leadership of the past eight years has created an environment conducive to economic growth.

Missouri remains a low tax, efficiently run state, according to all prominent national rankings.

According to recently published data from the United States Census Bureau, Missouri ranks 40th in the nation in per capita tax burden and 47th in state government expenditures per capita.

We are a fiscally conservative state and will remain so during my administration.

We're only one of a few states that have maintained our Triple-A bond rating from the major rating agencies.

And the national publication, Governing Magazine, considers Missouri one of the best managed states in the nation.

More Missourians are working than ever before.

Personal income is up.

And Missourians are enjoying unprecedented tax relief.

Thanks to bipartisan tax cuts, our citizens are paying \$753 million less in taxes than in 1992.

Since Fiscal Year 1999, our state's general revenue spending has grown slower than personal income, and since Fiscal Year 1995, we have refunded \$973 million to Missouri taxpayers.

However, even though our economic foundation is strong, we're now experiencing the same sluggishness that is being seen at the national level.

Our state revenue collections have slowed down, due to a decrease in capital gains from the stock market and slowing sales tax growth.

Last year's revenues came in \$116 million lower than projected.

At the same time, our costs to the state have risen higher than anyone anticipated.

The costs of federal mandates are more than estimated.

Health care costs for seniors and those with disabilities continue to rise.

And tax credits, which received widespread bipartisan support, are taking a much bigger bite out of our budget than anyone believed they would.

In Fiscal Year 1996, these tax credits cost the state almost \$50 million.

By Fiscal Year 2002, their price tag will reach over \$200 million.

In total, the combination of tax cuts, tax credits, and tax refunds have returned almost \$2 billion to Missouri taxpayers during the past six years.

It is only proper that Missouri taxpayers should share in our recent economic prosperity.

However, the combination of a slowing economy, deep tax cuts, and unexpected mandatory expenses have put stress on our state budget.

Therefore, the first priority of this legislative session must be to tighten our belts and deliver a balanced budget.

However, I will not allow this difficult situation to weaken our investment in the top priority of my administration education.

Granted, this is not the budget situation any of us wanted.

It's certainly not the financial circumstances I wanted as I begin my administration.

Nor is it the financial situation many of you on both sides of the aisle foresaw when you were voting for tax cuts and tax credits during those years when revenue was growing more than expected.

But it is the economic reality we've been given.

Factors beyond our control have changed the economic climate dramatically.

Now our challenge is making that climate work for us in building a better Missouri.

I look forward to working with Senator Russell and Representative Green and their budget committee members in meeting this challenge.

I am committed to protecting the key priorities of most Missourians education and prescription drug services.

But we must take the fiscally responsible actions necessary to keep our state's economy strong during the tough times, so we can continue to prosper in the good times.

EDUCATION

The best way we can invest in Missouri's future is by opening new educational opportunities for our children.

Education must be our number one priority.

The cornerstones of my plan to improve education include: adequate resources, quality teachers, parental involvement, accountability, technology, and a safe environment where students are ready to learn.

That task begins by ensuring that Missouri teachers and students have the resources they need to improve performance.

That's why my top priority this year will be to fully fund the school foundation formula.

Effective classroom resources are not enough by themselves.

We must have teachers like my first grade teacher Mrs. Smotherman, who can provide the best quality of instruction because they are the chief determining factor in improving student performance.

We must encourage our teachers to strengthen their skills.

We can accomplish that goal through the National Board Certification program.

To receive this certification, teachers go through a rigorous one-year evaluation and examination period.

During this time, they must demonstrate a mastery of advanced national standards in their subject area.

Typically, this process involves more than 200 hours of after school work from teachers, detailing and reflecting upon their teaching approach and strategies.

We are honored to have one of those teachers here with us today from West Boulevard Elementary in Columbia Sunita Bajpai.

And if you doubt how difficult it is to achieve this status, just talk to Sunita.

Less than one out of two teachers successfully complete the program the first time.

It's a great pleasure to introduce you to one of our excellent Missouri National Board Certified teachers.

We only have 44 teachers like her in the entire state.

Sunita, would you please stand.

I want to see one thousand teachers like Sunita in our state over the next four years of my administration.

Following the lead of the 15 states that have been at the forefront in training National Board Certified teachers, I am recommending a \$5,000 annual salary supplement for any Missouri teacher who completes this program.

And those who agree to help mentor other Missouri teachers for certification would receive a ten percent salary supplement.

I want to thank Senator Bentley and Senator Stoll for agreeing to sponsor this legislation.

I was just with Senator Bentley and other legislators last week at Pleasant View Middle School in Springfield on this very issue.

Both Senator Bentley and Senator Stoll have a longtime commitment to education, and I am confident they will be excellent spokespeople for the merits of this program.

In addition to adequate resources and good teachers, another key component in effective learning is parental involvement.

Unfortunately, many parents don't have a full and accurate picture of how well their child is doing at school as compared to children at other public schools.

I want to give Missouri parents that picture by establishing school accountability report cards.

This action will go one step beyond our present requirement for school district report cards, so parents will know exactly what is happening at their child's individual school.

Parents will receive information on classroom conditions, the professional qualifications of their child's teachers, class size, graduation and dropout rates, school safety, and a report on how their tax dollars are being spent.

They will be able to find even more extensive information at the school and on the Internet.

By holding schools accountable in this way, parents, taxpayers, and school patrons can compare the evaluation of their school with other schools in the area.

School report cards will also be useful to other schools--pointing out successful school strategies and practices that other schools can adopt to improve their institution.

We also are finding that technology is the tool that has the capacity to reform the classroom.

It changes the way teachers teach and students learn.

Students are more motivated and their achievement scores are higher.

Over the past few years, we've seen a greatly strengthened commitment to technology in our schools.

Today the ratio of students per computer in our schools is less than five to one.

The rate of students per Internet-connected computer is less than ten to one.

Our administration wants to continue to integrate these new technological tools into our children's learning so they will have the job skills to succeed in this new century economy.

So we are recommending an increased investment in technology grants from the primary grades to the postsecondary level.

The last critical element to student achievement is setting a classroom environment where students are respectful and involved in their work.

Many other states across the nation have found that establishing some form of character education in the school curriculum helps in establishing that environment.

In many respects, character education initiatives formally recognize and support what good parents and good teachers have always tried to instill in students responsibility, respect, trustworthiness, fairness, caring, and citizenship.

Our state is well positioned to expand character education across Missouri.

This year, I want to provide funding so more schools can establish character education programs.

And over the next four years, I'd like to see that every Missouri school that wishes to integrate character education into the school environment has access to the teacher training and resource materials they need.

HEALTHY FAMILIES

In spite of this being a tight budget year, we have a rare opportunity to take steps to ensure a healthy future for Missouri families in the 21st century.

I want to see that our state's portion of the national tobacco settlement is used for vital health care needs contained in the Healthy Families Initiative that I will outline today.

A major portion of this initiative is focused on helping our senior citizens cope with skyrocketing prescription costs.

As you know, Medicare doesn't cover prescription drugs, and many of our seniors certainly cannot afford to buy separate insurance.

Many of these elderly people have multiple prescriptions for expensive medicines medicines that cost them thousands of dollars a month costs that sometimes exceed their income.

So what do they do about the situation?

For far too many, the answer is they go without their medicines an act that often leads to even more serious illness and heavy medical bills.

Like so many of you, I have heard heartbreaking stories from Missouri seniors living on limited incomes who are forced to choose between the medicines they need and their ability to buy food or pay their rent or utility bills.

What a terrible dilemma.

And all I can say is: shame on us shame on us for allowing that to go on in this state and this country.

Prescription drug relief for seniors is one of my highest priorities this year.

And I want in fact I need for it to be one of yours, too.

Under my plan, no eligible senior will pay more than \$1,500 a person or \$3,000 a family for their prescription drugs in any one year.

In addition, those seniors and those disabled Missourians on Medicare or Supplemental Security Income who do not already have insurance coverage for prescriptions will be able to buy their medicines at reduced rates up to 20 percent less than they are currently paying.

Because of these actions, we will be able to phase out our present prescription drug tax credit, which has failed to help those seniors who most need our assistance because of catastrophic health care costs.

The second piece of my Healthy Families Initiative tackles our problem of providing health care access to all Missourians.

Over 90 percent of our counties are designated as shortage areas for health care professionals.

At the same time, many of our medical facilities that treat uninsured Missourians are facing budget cuts that may force them to reduce medical services to the poor.

I want to see us maintain a health care system that provides continued health care access for low-income adults, guarantees hospital care for the uninsured, increases medical education payments to teaching hospitals so they can afford the cost of training doctors and nurses, and establishes grants for rural and hospital-based clinics so they can continue to help the uninsured.

I believe we need recruitment incentives so primary care doctors and dentists will take their practices into the underserved areas of our state.

We will also establish a telehealth center at the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Medicine so patients and providers can interact with health care professionals miles away and medical training is available to doctors in isolated areas of the state.

Another part of our tobacco settlement money must be spent on programs that prevent smoking.

While we already provide resources to prevent tobacco use, our state still ranks fifth in the nation in the percentage of adults who do smoke.

Almost a third of our high school students smoke.

With those statistics, it probably doesn't surprise you that our state ranks well above average in diseases related to smoking heart disease, cancer, and other diseases.

Obviously, our efforts are not working.

While we are investing a great deal of money in anti-smoking activities, those activities are scattered.

We must bring coordination to this process and focus our existing resources as well as bolster what we are currently doing with a substantial new investment in preventing our citizens from taking up this addictive and harmful habit.

I want to invest in a comprehensive tobacco prevention plan that has proven effective in other states to help communities develop their own anti-smoking education programs and to fund a statewide media campaign against smoking.

One area that holds exciting promise for both the future health of Missouri citizens and our economy is the life sciences.

Missouri has the opportunity to be a leader in this field.

We must seize this opportunity by investing in research at our public institutions.

From what I have already seen across our state, I am convinced the life sciences will lead us to tremendous advancements in the prevention and treatment of diseases such as cancer, arthritis, diabetes, and AIDS.

A perfect example of what I am talking about is one of our guests today, Dr. Michael DeBaun, who serves as Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at Washington University and a clinical director at St. Louis Children's Hospital.

Dr. DeBaun has been conducting clinical research on sickle cell disease and the children who suffer strokes that go undetected as a result of this disease.

He's studying how to best identify children who have suffered one of these strokes and what kind of educational rehabilitation can be done to help them catch up at school.

The research Dr. DeBaun is doing will make a difference in the lives of countless children in the future.

Dr. DeBaun, would you please stand so we can recognize you for the fine work you are doing.

Another way we are improving the quality of life for our citizens through the life sciences is by targeting environmental pollution and improving the way we treat our drinking water and our industrial and hazardous waste.

I also want Missouri's life science corridor to extend throughout the fields and pastures of our state.

Agriculture has always been the foundation of our state's economy, and it can strengthen our future as well.

If we take the opportunity, our corn and beans can provide us with immunity from disease, and fuel our vehicles, and nourish our families.

Milk from our dairy industry can do more than just build strong bones.

It can become a new source for insulin and other new medical treatments.

I want to link the scientist with the farmer through our life science advancements and our Department of Agriculture.

Life science possibilities can provide new opportunities for our next generation of family farmers.

Our potential for new foods and new uses for food products are endless through life science research.

At the same time, the life sciences will strengthen our economy through the high wage jobs and industry growth they create.

Studies have demonstrated that the return on our investment in life science health research is more than 15 to 1.

I believe investing a part of the tobacco settlement in the life sciences is critical to ensuring Missouri's ability to compete in a new century and guarantee continued economic growth for all Missourians.

The last portion of our tobacco settlement money should be spent on giving more Missouri children a healthy start in life.

Lori and I know the value of our state's nationally recognized early childhood program, Parents As Teachers, because we've been participants with our two boys, Robert and John D.

Through Parents As Teachers and other community-based initiatives, families learn the value of good preventive health care choices for their children and can guide them toward healthy lifestyle choices and success in school.

Unfortunately, at the present time, much of our early childhood efforts are not reaching those who need it most our at-risk children in low-income families.

They deserve a healthy start in life.

I want to commit part of our tobacco settlement money to reach out to these at-risk families so they can have the same opportunities for success as so many other Missouri families.

Next week I will issue an executive order establishing the Healthy Families Trust Fund.

All tobacco settlement money will be placed in this fund so we can keep track of how much is being used for each part of our initiative prescription drug costs, health care access, anti-smoking programs, life sciences, and early childhood care.

In this way, we will have the accountability in place to assure the taxpayers that all the tobacco money is going to the areas I have identified.

HEALTHY WOMEN

Another segment of our population that deserves the opportunity for better health care is Missouri women.

While most of our state HMO health care plans allow complete access to family doctors and pediatricians, women have problems getting direct access to their OB/GYNs.

Our current law only requires health care plans to cover one annual visit without a referral.

I want to see us change the law so women can have access to their OB/GYNs whenever it is medically appropriate for important procedures.

I also believe it's critical that Missouri women are notified annually about covered services such as Pap tests and mammograms and that they have access to the best available cancer screenings such as the ThinPrep Pap test, which reduces the need for repeat testing.

According to the American Cancer Society, 3,700 Missouri women will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year, and 800 of them will die.

Three hundred women will test positive for cervical cancer.

Eighty percent of the women who die from cervical cancer had not had a pap test in at least five years.

Too many of us know too many women wives, daughters, sisters, mothers, and grandmothers who have suffered, or even worse, lost their lives because of these deadly diseases.

Early detection is the best way to ensure survival.

By requiring annual notification of cancer screenings that are covered by health care plans and calling for expanded access, we can greatly improve the quality of life and health of women in the state of Missouri.

One more reminder or one extra doctor's visit can make a difference. Let's make that difference.

TRANSPORTATION

When we talk about missed opportunities in Missouri, the prime example is transportation.

Transportation is an issue that touches every citizen in our state young or old, urban or rural, Democrat or Republican.

And it holds such rich potential for Missouri.

We have a prime geographic location, the two largest inland waterways, two international airports, the second largest rail center in the nation, and we hold a key position in the I-35 corridor that links us to important trade partners.

We have the potential to be a significant international hub in the 21st century.

Yet sadly, transportation has been neglected for too long to the detriment of the personal safety of our citizens and our economy.

One-third of our bridges need improvement or replacement.

Five thousand miles of our roads and 5,700 intersections need safety improvements.

Our transit system is in jeopardy.

And we are unable to furnish the assistance we need for rail, air, or ports.

All of these deficiencies are impeding our ability to compete in this 21st century economy.

In the case of our highway system, what is even more staggering is the human cost.

One person is injured every 6.7 minutes on our roadways and bridges.

Three Missourians are killed every day.

And each of them is much more than a number.

They are a neighbor a family member a friend.

We will miss them and always wonder why they were taken from us so senselessly.

One of those Missourians was a 17-year-old girl Kristin Nicole Hendrickson.

Just three months before graduation, through no fault of her own, she never got to walk up the aisle to get her diploma.

Her prom dress hung in the closet unworn.

She never read her college acceptance letter.

Because Kristin died on a two-lane stretch of Highway 61 between Canton and LaGrange when a pickup truck tried to pass another car and hit her head-on.

So many people have lost their lives on that stretch of road that it has become known as "Death Alley."

But because of Kristin's classmates at Canton High School, something tragic also became something inspiring.

These young people started a grassroots movement called SMART Students of Missouri Assisting Rural Transportation.

They wrote letters, gathered petition signatures, lobbied legislators, and even testified at a Missouri Highway and Transportation Commission meeting to make a safer four-lane highway on this stretch of road a priority.

Because of their efforts, a project to widen this section of Highway 61 is now a high priority of our Transportation Department.

But the young people of SMART have not stopped there.

They are trying to organize SMART chapters all over Missouri, working to improve our state transportation system for all Missourians.

I just visited with these wonderful young people last week in my office, and they told me about their friend Kristin.

Please join me in welcoming these unbelievably committed young people and Kristin's parents, Bill and Julie Hendrickson, who are showing all of us how to get things done.

So the real question is: if this group of young people can get done what needs to get done, why can't we?

We have put off fixing our transportation system for too long because the cure was expensive because we couldn't agree on what to do and because no one was willing to take the lead on a solution.

I am prepared to take that lead.

It is time for us to stop looking backward and placing blame for prior mistakes and inaction.

The longer we wait, the worse our situation becomes.

It's time we come together as one Missouri.

Let us come together this session to develop a transportation system that will keep our citizens safe and spur economic growth in the 21st century.

And we must insist on accountability.

We have to give the public the confidence that every dollar they're spending on transportation is spent wisely and efficiently, and we're getting the full benefit of those dollars.

Don't let anyone tell us we can't get this done.

This is our time.

This is our responsibility.

We must act.

.08 BLOOD ALCOHOL CONTENT

Poor road conditions are not the only reason we lose lives on our highways in Missouri.

Drunk drivers are another major cause.

Almost two out of every five Americans will be involved in an alcohol-related crash at some point in their lives.

Right now, in Missouri, the blood alcohol content for being arrested as a drunk driver is .10, even though all the evidence shows that a driver is substantially impaired at the .08 level.

An analysis of the first five states that lowered the blood alcohol limit to .08 revealed significant decreases in fatal crashes related to alcohol in four out of the five.

The tremendous toll in human life and suffering our higher blood alcohol content law is causing should be more than sufficient reason to lower the legal limit.

And federal authorities are also sending us a signal of how important they feel this issue is.

We are losing federal incentive money for our highways by not adopting .08.

We would be receiving an additional three million dollars every year now.

If we don't pass a .08 law by October 1, 2003, we will be paying a sanction in the neighborhood of \$8 million a penalty that increases to \$32 million in 2007 if we still haven't passed the bill.

Let's make it happen this year.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Another safety issue that demands our attention this legislative session is the silent sickness of our society known as domestic violence.

For too long, much of this abuse has been kept hushed up behind locked doors because women are afraid to report it.

Some feel some misguided sense of shame as if they have asked to be battered.

Or they simply don't know where to turn.

Only one in seven battered women call the police for help.

And the effect of this abuse is even more devastating on the children in these families.

They often suffer extreme mental stress and grow up to become abusers themselves.

Even though the late Mel Carnahan was the first governor to propose significant funding to fight domestic violence, we still have much left to do.

Only 46 of our state's 114 counties have domestic violence centers and support for battered women and their children.

What is truly shocking about the situation is the number of women and children turned away.

In 1999, nearly 5,000 Missouri women and children who sought shelter from abuse were told there was just no room.

That is why, even in this difficult budget period, I strongly recommend an additional \$3 million for local domestic violence shelters next fiscal year.

In many places where shelter assistance is available, the support is excellent.

One good example is Rose Brooks Center in Kansas City.

The current shelter only houses 50 people.

But when the new Center opens in August, 75 women and children will have a safe haven from abuse.

Rose Brooks clearly illustrates what can be accomplished when we work together.

Public funding at the state and federal level combined with private funding sources made this new facility possible.

Please help me recognize the Executive Director of Rose Brooks, Susan Miller.

I will be appointing a special task force on domestic violence in the next few weeks to conduct the first ever inventory of our state's funding and resources to deal with domestic violence.

This task force will also develop a strategic action plan for how we can coordinate and integrate our approach to domestic violence, based on needs and priorities.

Because of her extensive experience in this field, I have asked Susan if she would agree to serve as the first member of this task force when it is appointed, and she has accepted.

MORE EFFICIENT GOVERNMENT

If we are to fully realize the opportunities that this new century will bring, we must continue to make our state government more efficient and effective.

Business continually finds new and better ways to serve their customers, and I want Missouri government to do the same.

We must improve the services we provide to our citizens.

To do this, we need to set the priorities we want to achieve, measure our success in meeting those priorities, and use this information to drive decisions that will bring us greater success.

We've already seen some great examples of how this can work.

In our Department of Revenue, state employees worked on evaluating the cost of red tape in their agency and then made it a priority to cut costs.

Because of those efforts, they created simpler tax forms, promoted the electronic filing of tax returns, and now thanks to legislative approval, offer two-year automobile registration, saving our taxpayers millions of hours of time and a great deal of money.

I want to use this model to look at the total cost of state government.

With our tight budget, I want to make certain every tax dollar is working for the taxpayers.

I want to find ways we can take the hassle out of dealing with state agencies.

I want to see us combine overlapping programs, employ cutting edge technology, and do more with less.

CONCLUSION

Before I joined you this morning, I was with some young students from around the state, including my hometown of Birch Tree.

We weren't physically in the same place, but the wonders of modern technology brought us together for an electronic dialogue.

Because of such amazing advancements, our students in rural areas no longer have to hope the world's knowledge and experiences will come to them.

They can go out and find that knowledge and experience on-line.

So much has changed for the better since I took that first mile and a half walk to a one- room schoolhouse.

But all that progress has been possible because of one constant that will never change the imagination and hard work of Missouri's people.

Their dreams and labors have brought us far in the last century.

And they can take us even farther in this new century if we work together, as a Governor and a legislature, to do what is right for them with our actions if we give them the opportunity to fulfill their potential.

Over the last few years, the wise decisions made by many of you here today have provided those opportunities.

Now, in this time of challenge, we must make tough choices to ensure Missouri continues to head in the right direction.

Those choices carry no partisan label.

They must only pass one simple test.

Are these actions right for Missouri?

What is right for Missouri this year means improving our schools helping our seniors deal with the soaring cost of prescription drugs making certain our fiscal house is in order.

We must work together to meet those commitments.

I realize that's not as easy as it sounds.

After all, I've sat where you're sitting right there in seat 76 for six years.

But I will tell you one thing that helped me during those hours of spirited debate.

Whenever the discussion would become heated the issue would be extremely complicated or I would feel discouraged, there would always be a moment when I would look straight ahead at this dais.

And there, emblazoned in gold letters, I would see what you see today what countless people that have been given this sacred trust have seen from their first day in this hallowed chamber "Let the welfare of the people be the supreme law."

Those ten words are our guide.

They are our responsibility.

They are our vision.

They are why we are here.

In the spirit of bipartisanship and our mutual love for Missouri, let us honor them with our actions in the weeks the months the years to come.

Thank you.
